

# Elementary Curriculum Design

The purpose of this document is to set out in broad terms the central purposes, content, activities, and key materials of the new 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Grade **D.A.R.E.** Curriculum. It is also intended to enable the **D.A.R.E.** officer-instructors to understand:

1. which ideas, values, and skills are most important for these 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> graders to learn,
2. the assumptions and principles about how they best learn this content,
3. the assumptions and principles about teaching practices that are most likely to foster the learning desired, and
4. the reasons for using “D.A.R.E: A Look at Your Decisions” as the overarching organizer of the entire curriculum and how all of the content, objectives, and activities are “glued” together by this organizer.
5. This curriculum spirals and links to the Middle School Curriculum, “Taking Charge of Your Life.”

The officers are intended to envision how the key ideas, skills, and learning activities connect over the lessons to form a continuous flow of learning.

## Key Assumptions and Principles

1. Successful prevention programs include a focus on the following content:
  - The health, social, and legal risks and short-term consequences involved in using tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, inhalants, and other illegal drugs.
  - Students’ normative beliefs about the extent of substance use by peers are often distorted but can be examined, reflected upon, and changed through understanding the actual extent of use by peers.
  - Communication, assertiveness, refusal strategies, and other resistance skills are central to being able to cope with the desire and pressures to use substances.
  - Successful drug prevention strategies require:
    - the involvement of parents and community leaders
    - multi-year interventions,
    - activities that students view as realistic and engaging,
    - sufficient time to support extensive practice and in-depth classroom discussions.
2. Elementary students’ perspectives and ways of learning:
  - 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> graders want to assume more responsibility for personal **Decision-Making** with constructive feedback from significant adults.
  - They want to talk about and examine realistic, problematic situations.
  - Students are early adolescents who want to be treated with respect.

- The materials and lessons need to be developmentally appropriate.
- They want safe and supportive relationships with adults.
- Because they have diverse personal, social, and cultural backgrounds, they learn in diverse ways. Accordingly, learning activities need to provide multiple access points and learning opportunities.
- 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade students can develop communication, social, assertiveness, and problem-solving skills that will enable them to resist pressures to use substances or engage in bullying activities.

3. Theories/Research on child development show that 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade students:

- want to feel that they belong and are respected by their peers
  - are able to understand the perspectives of others (less egocentric)
  - are capable of integrating several variables in causal relationships
  - are able to understand and use the rules of logic
  - are enthusiastic, curious, and have a desire to explore
  - are beginning to accept responsibility for behavior
  - learn to cooperate in and enjoy group **Decision-Making**
  - like to talk and express ideas
  - are oriented to and seek reinforcement from both peers and significant adults

4. Theories/Research on active learning and teaching strategies which support such learning show that:

- Students' life experiences and cultural context form their core beliefs and how they view their worlds and make sense of them.
- New information and skills must connect with the beliefs, feelings, and ideas students have in order to be integrated into a person's cognition.
- Hands-on and minds-on experiences foster the development of new and expanded understandings and beliefs.
- In-depth deliberations with peers and significant adults foster the examination, reflection on, and cognitive integration of ideas and beliefs.
- Females, minorities, special students must have access to the activities and content in ways that assure all are respected and included.
- Social and cultural diversity must be respected and supported.
- Open-mindedness and critical examination of ideas/beliefs are to be valued.

## Curriculum Design Criteria

Based on the research and theories summarized above, a set of criteria was formed which guided the development and organization of the key aspects of this educational program. While the curriculum design is intended to be essentially the same across the nation, the specific problems, materials, and strategies must be appropriate for the cultural and social context of each school. This means that Officers may, on a few occasions, need to select alternative materials, activities, and teaching strategies that

they believe are more appropriate for their students **while staying consistent with the purposes and criteria of the design**. As will become more evident, extended (5 or more minutes) use of a lecture-based approach is **NOT** consistent with this curriculum.

A central and distinguishing feature of this curriculum design is the overarching organizer which is: “**D.A.R.E: A Look at Your Decisions**” The information, principles, and skills and the activities within the lessons are all designed to build students’ capacities to solve difficult personal and social problems related to substance use and abuse and to make and act on decisions that are informed and in their best interest. We attempt to provide students access to these capacities in ways that are appealing, use effective instructional strategies, and are realistic in the eyes of students. The intent is to have students engage in realistic situations, seek and use the best information available, discuss in-depth with others alternative takes on the situations and alternative but responsible actions they could take. In addition to extensive discussion, there are ample opportunities to “try on” ways to deal with pressures from friends and internal feelings of wanting to be accepted as a “cool” person.

Consistent with the objectives of this design, the principles and assumptions derived from the research, the following criteria were developed to guide lesson development and teaching in ways that also enable students to develop understandings and skills for “D.A.R.E: A Look at Your Decisions.”

- Research-based information: information on tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and inhalants is to be gained via inquiry into the most recent research while the groups/class is problem solving.
- Problems Driven: the dominant organizer of content and student activities is a problematic situation, typically one in which pressure is being exerted to use drugs.
- Authentic problems, dilemmas, and issues faced by many teens as they are pressured to experiment with or use tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, or inhalants are to be representative of actual problems faced by most middle grade students.
- Interactive: students are actively engaged in problem-solving, in-depth discussions, critical thinking, and role-playing with others.
- Spiral Structure: the concepts and skills are to be revisited throughout the 9+ lessons such that the skills are introduced, revisited, and practiced in more and more complex problematic situations,.
- Active Learning: activities are to reflect the extensive use of student to student engagements (cooperative learning groups, in-depth whole class discussions, role playing, etc.) through instructor guided in-depth discussions, role-playing the skills and concepts, and small group problem-solving/**Decision-Making**,
- **Teacher-as-partner**: because there is such a larger portion of nearly every lesson that engages students in active learning through small groups, the direct involvement of the classroom teacher is an essential aspect of the lessons.

## Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of the entire **D.A.R.E. program** is to significantly reduce/eliminate the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and the use of violent behavior by young people. The 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Grade **D.A.R.E. program** is the first in a series of three components (the remaining two curricula are at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade levels with the 7<sup>th</sup> grade program being integrally related to the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade program. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade program is a booster program. The primary objectives of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade programs are directed toward developing the capacities needed to enable students to take charge of their lives with particular emphasis on substance use and abuse. Those objectives include the following:

1. Students will understand the physical, emotional, social, and legal risks and effects of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and inhalants on their developing brains and bodies.
2. Students will compare and contrast the normative beliefs of peers in their classroom with the national data about teen use of ATOD and where dissonance emerges, revise their understandings/beliefs about how many peers do not use ATOD.
3. Students will expand their knowledge about a variety of positive things to do in their school and community (pro-social behavior) that do not involve the use of ATOD and will choose to engage in those activities rather than use ATOD.
4. Students will understand what refusal strategies, sound communication skills, and assertiveness and resistance skills are and will be able to apply them in developmentally appropriate ways in a variety of life-like situations.

